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THE PSYCHOLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF INDIRECT DISCOURSE.¹

I.

PSYCHOLOGICALLY speaking, there is no such thing as giving directly the words or thoughts of another person; for before we can express these thoughts, they must pass into our own minds, and our expression is then, strictly speaking, merely the expression of a section of our own consciousness. Still, the distinction which we make between direct and indirect discourse can be justified in psychology as well as in grammar. The difference between the two is that in direct discourse we make a positive effort to eliminate the work of our minds, and to report merely the record of our senses, while in indirect discourse we do not make this effort, but simply give expression to the thoughts of the other person exactly as they lie in our own consciousness at the time. This being the case, a psychological discussion of indirect discourse will have to do with the state or states of the mind which result from its contact with foreign ideas; in other words, the discussion must be based on a study of the mental processes which are involved in hearing, or reading, the thoughts of another person.

To avoid unnecessary complications in a matter which is, at the best, complicated enough, we will leave out of account, for the time being, such forms of speech as questions and commands, and will confine ourselves, at the outset, to the consideration of declarative statements addressed by one person to another, say by A to B.

To begin with, then, it is perfectly clear that the ideas expressed by A are not all received with the same readiness in the mind of B. Some ideas are inherently more difficult to grasp than others. But entirely apart from its inherent character, the difficulty or ease with which B takes up an idea

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expressed by A, will depend even more decidedly upon whether the idea has at some previous time been present in B's mind or not. If the idea has been so present and B is already familiar with it at the time when A expresses it, then A's statement will, of course, serve merely to call it up again in B's consciousness. This is a very simple and rapid psychological process. It requires no appreciable time or effort of B. And as B will at once recognize the idea as his own, he will, of course, under all ordinary conditions, not ascribe it to A at all, even though A has expressed it. Therefore, in case B ever expresses this idea, he will naturally express it as his own. Hence in such a case indirect discourse is not possible.

Very different is the case, on the other hand, when A says something which B will not recognize as his own, but as A's, that is, when A tells B something which B does not know as yet, and with which his mind has had no previous experience. It is only under such conditions that B can ever look upon an idea in his own mind as still belonging to A, and it is only in this case, therefore, that indirect discourse will naturally result. This is the case, then, that we must now proceed to consider in some detail.

We find in the first place, that at the time when A makes his statement, the idea which he expresses is a fully assimilated and integral part of his mental stock, a finished product, if we may use the term, which is ready for delivery. The process of transfer from A to B will consist of two parts: The first is the utterance of A, the second is the mental activity of B, by which the idea is either accommodated to the content of his mind, or else is found incompatible with it and is rejected. If the idea is accepted by B, it becomes in due time a part of *his* mental stock, and is then, in the end, with him just what it originally was with A, a finished product ready for delivery. Therefore, if upon reaching this point, B should express himself so far as that particular idea is concerned, he would do it just as A did it before him, that is, his attitude toward the idea would be that of the full possessor.

Now, it is neither the original utterance by A, nor this final

utterance by B, with which we are at present concerned. For in both of these utterances the speakers are merely expressing ideas which they must feel to be their own. Indirect discourse, on the other hand, has to do only with the expression of ideas belonging to other persons. Genuine, spontaneous, indirect discourse will, therefore, be employed only during that time which follows the original utterance of A, and precedes the complete assimilation of the idea in the mind of B, that is, during the time when the idea has as yet been but partially or conditionally appropriated by B, or it may be, has failed of acceptance altogether. For it is only in this preliminary state of incomplete assimilation that the idea, while already present in B's mind, still appears to him to belong to A.

Let us, then, examine more closely this preliminary condition, in which the idea is temporarily delayed or permanently arrested in its progress toward full assimilation in the mind of B. We find that this preliminary process really embraces two stages, which can easily be distinguished, an earlier and a later. The change from the one to the other is occasioned by a shifting of the attention on the part of B. In the very beginning, while A is speaking, B's attention is, of course, fixed mainly upon him and his actions, and it is not until A has done, that this attention turns with any completeness to the idea itself. In the first stage, therefore, that is, in the time during and directly following the utterance of A, the idea is marked in B's mind by an overwhelming sense of the original speaker's authorship and ownership. It is not, indeed, so much an idea, as it is an activity of A, that fills B's mind at this time.

But as B's attention is more and more withdrawn from the speaker and confined to the idea itself, this strong feeling of A's ownership and authorship of the idea will, of course, likewise gradually fade away in B's mind, until finally the sense of A's connection with the idea becomes quite vague and dim. This is the second stage in the preliminary process of assimilation, in which the idea lies in B's mind as a more or less abstract proposition, as so much pure thought-matter, more or less neutral so far as relations of ownership to individual persons are

concerned. After this point is reached, if conditions are favorable, the idea will move on into the third and last stage of assimilation, and will pass completely into the possession of B, or in other words, the sense of B's own possession of it will take the place of his former sense of A's possession.

We may, then, roughly designate the three stages in the process of complete transfer and assimilation of an idea, as they are reflected in the successive states of B's mind, as follows: (1) idea + A; (2) idea, more or less pure; (3) idea + B. In those cases where ideas expressed by A are but partially or conditionally assimilated by B, or are rejected entirely, of course only the first two of these stages are ever reached: (1) idea + A; (2) idea, more or less free from personal associations.

II.

Fortunately, we have preserved to us, in Latin, cases of direct spontaneous expression of each of these three stages in the assimilation of ideas. For convenience we will take them up in the reverse order, and will discuss first the stage that is reached last. In this stage, the one in which the idea has been fully absorbed by B, and is completely in his possession, his method of expressing it will, of course, be the declarative statement, just as it was in the original expression by A. This is not indirect discourse, and with this stage in the process we are, therefore, not concerned, except, perhaps, in so far as the parenthetical remarks which proceed from the reporter's own knowledge, and which have the indicative in Latin, may be said to have a legitimate place in a discussion of indirect discourse.

The second stage in the process has been described as the one in which the sense of A's authorship of the idea, and the prominence of A's personality in it has, so far as B's consciousness is concerned, faded away to a certain extent, in which the idea is left in B's mind as pure thought-matter which is not very closely associated with an owner. The direct expression of an idea in this stage may be expected, therefore, after B's mind has been busy with the idea for a time, without being able completely to assimilate it.

Now if we stop to think about these efforts which B has, by this time, made to assimilate the idea, we must realize that they cannot have occurred without affecting the form of the idea itself. One change, at least, the idea must have suffered, a change that every idea undergoes when it is subjected to mental labor. We mean the change by which the idea is inevitably reduced to that which to the hearer's mind is its simplest and most portable shape, through the elimination of all that is irrelevant or of no present consequence to the hearer. The spontaneous expression of a foreign idea under such circumstances must, then, amount to the expression of that particular phase of the idea which especially interests the hearer.

In extant Latin literature we find frequent use made of such expressions at the beginnings of new scenes in comedy, where the purpose is at once to sum up a conversation which has just been carried on off the stage, and to show the speaker's attitude toward the subject of this conversation. So in the *Adelphi* of Terence (ll. 447-9), when several new characters come upon the stage with the following conversation:

Hegio. Pro di immortales, facinus indignum, Geta,
quod narras!

Geta. Sic est factum.

Hegio. Ex illan familia
tam inliberale esse ortum facinus!

As this case and many others like it show, the natural mode of expression in Latin for this, the second stage of assimilation, is the infinitive—what the grammars call an infinitive exclamation of surprise or incredulity.

Not all infinitives of exclamation fall under this head, however, for besides expressing the speaker's attitude toward statements of other people, this construction may also, and often does, express his attitude toward ideas which have come to him in other ways—from his own observation, experience, or past thinking. These observations and experiences of the speaker's own are often found by him to be just as difficult of assimilation as the things which are said by another. So in Terence's *Andria*, 870, when Simo exclaims over the waywardness of his son:

Tantum laborem capere ob talem filium!

So far as the speaker himself is concerned, this independent use of the infinitive in a case of his own observation or experience is not different from its use with reference to an idea originally expressed by another person. In the latter case the speaker's sense of the original ownership or authorship of the idea has simply faded out, while in the former case such a sense of authorship never existed, and in both cases that phase of the idea which particularly interests the speaker and receives his whole attention, seems at the time utterly impossible of comprehension. Hence the surprise or incredulity.

Still a third independent infinitive which may be mentioned in this connection, is the so-called historical infinitive, what Professor Lane called the "infinitive of intimation." This infinitive is used especially in narrating a series of events which all crowd before the speaker's mind at once, or succeed each other so rapidly that he does not have time to get the individual ideas all completely under his control. In the case of the exclamatory infinitive we saw that the individual idea was not made the speaker's own, because of its incompatibility with his existing state of mind. In the case of the infinitive of intimation the *series* of ideas is not thoroughly made his own, because of their rapid succession, or their great number or diversity of character. Psychologically, therefore, the ideas expressed by the infinitive of intimation exist in the speaker's mind in the same state as those other ideas, proceeding either from the statements of other persons or from his own experience, which he has not been able to absorb completely, that is, these ideas are all in a state of incomplete association or assimilation. And this incomplete assimilation in B's mind of the idea expressed by A, is exactly the condition of the idea which is reflected in indirect discourse.

If we examine our mental habits, we find that we do not by any means always completely absorb the ideas we hear expressed. We all maintain a certain standard in the amount of corroborative evidence which we require of our own minds, before we will allow ourselves to decide whether that which someone else has said is true or false, whether we shall ourselves accept it as our own or reject it. As a matter of fact, in the case of very many

things that we hear, this standard is never reached at all, and cannot be reached, simply because it is not possible for us either to have or to get the experience and knowledge with regard to the idea, which is necessary for a positive judgment of our own. To be sure, the general credibility of the person speaking may, even in such cases, decide in his favor, and may get us to state as a truth, from our own standpoint, what, strictly speaking, is a truth only from his standpoint. But when this happens, we simply say, "The thing is so," not, "He says it is so," and there is no indirect discourse. We must therefore exclude this possibility from our discussion. We have at present to do only with those cases where B does not feel competent to pass final judgment on what A has said, and must therefore leave the idea to rest upon its own merits as an abstract proposition, or upon the authority of the original speaker. And an idea in this state, after the hearer's mind has been at work with it for a time, and his consciousness of its connection with the original speaker has become somewhat faint, is in Latin expressed, as we saw, by the infinitive.

Having now considered the second and third stages, we shall pass on to consider the first stage in the process of assimilation. At this stage, as we saw, the hearer's attention has not yet been completely transferred from the speaker himself to the idea he has expressed, and the personality of A and the sense of his authorship are therefore still very strong and vivid in B's mind. The difference between this stage and the second, or infinitive stage, which we have just spoken about, is that in this first stage the mind of B has not yet had time to busy itself with the idea. That being so, we should expect that B's expression, uttered as it is directly after that of A, would present the idea to us in practically the same form in which it was expressed by A. And this we find to be actually the case, with the exception, in Latin, that the verb is very often in the subjunctive, even when A used the imperative or the indicative. For example, after an imperative :

Most. 633. *Tranio*. Dic te daturum ut abeat. *Theopropides*. Egon dicam dare?

Capt. 139. *Hegio*. Ne fle. *Ergasilus*. Egon illum non fleam?

After an indicative question :

Ad. 374. *Syrus*. Quid agitur? *Demea*. Quid agatur?

Ad. 84. *Micio*. Quid is fecit? *Demea*. Quid ille fecerit?

After an indicative statement :

Andria 915. *Chremes*. Bonus est hic vir. *Simo*. Hic vir sit bonus?

Curc. 615. *Phaedromus*. Virgo haec liberast. *Therapontigonus*. Mean ancilla libera ut sit?

There is really nothing in this class of constructions that requires explanation except the subjunctive. But why should an idea expressed by A in the indicative have the subjunctive when it is expressed by B? From the examples given it is clear that the change in mood is not due to what A says or the way in which he says it, but that it must be due to something in the state of B's mind when he hears it, or in other words, to the effect produced upon B by the mere fact of A's utterance. For, as we saw, B uses the subjunctive in his retort exactly in the same way, whether A's original expression was a statement, a question, or a command. If we examine these three cases individually, we can readily understand why an imperative should change to a subjunctive. For when A gives a command to B, the latter would naturally, upon applying it to himself, *i. e.*, the first person, express it by the subjunctive, for in the first and third person the subjunctive regularly performs the same functions that the imperative performs in the second person. But why B should also use the subjunctive to express his mind upon hearing statements and questions that are put by A in the indicative, is not so easy to see.

In looking for the explanation of this peculiar phenomenon, we need to realize that it is in no sense an exceptional, but rather a thoroughly universal state of affairs with which we have to deal. For we find this exchange of mood in indirect discourse in Greek and the Germanic languages, no less than in Latin. We are fully justified in asserting, therefore, that the change is due to a general cause operating in all cases alike, or in other words, that there must be some common, fundamental, universal characteristic of the hearer's state of mind in this earliest stage

of the process of assimilation, which has led him to express himself in the same way, whether it be a statement that he hears, or a command, or a question, whether it be an indicative, a subjunctive, or an imperative. But what is this pervading quality of the hearer's consciousness, and what force of the subjunctive — or optative — is it that makes this mood his natural medium of expression?

We saw at the beginning of our discussion that an idea expressed by A has either been previously present in the mind of B, or it has not been present. In case it has been present, the only activity aroused in B's mind by A's utterance is the simple recognition of the idea, which is already in his possession. In this case we saw that indirect discourse was impossible. On the other hand, when A's idea is new to B, then a more or less lengthy process of assimilation is necessary in B's mind. And we found that it is during the earlier, or preliminary stages of this process, while assimilation is yet incomplete, that indirect discourse has its origin. When the subjunctive is used, therefore, to express an idea in the first part of this state of incomplete assimilation, it must have that force which will reflect the peculiar characteristic which distinguishes the mental process of active assimilation from that of mere recognition. And this distinguishing characteristic is easy enough to detect. It is the much greater effort which the mind, consciously enough, puts forth to assimilate the strange idea. To the original speaker, in whose mind the idea is already assimilated, the necessity of this effort is of course not so apparent; but to B, who has the actual work of assimilation to do, the effort is just as real and necessary as though A had given a command to his mental activities, instead of merely making a statement or asking a question. Hence B, at least in this early stage, when the stress of mental work is greatest and the personal element is most prominent, both feels and expresses the foreign idea, as if it were a demand made upon his mental powers by A. The subjunctive would then be the same subjunctive as that by which B retorts in case of a command, *i. e.*, it is a variety of what we may call the *reflex volitive*. Commands, statements, and questions are all, in the

very earliest stage of assimilation, felt by B merely as commands, or at least as demands upon his assimilative powers. After this first shock, of course, as B's mind recovers its equilibrium and gradually gains control of the idea instead of being mastered by it, and as A's personality fades from it, with the transfer of B's attention to the thought, this feeling of subjection to A's behest also vanishes, and the second stage of the assimilative process, the infinitive stage, supersedes the first or subjunctive stage.

There are two lines of external evidence which may be offered in favor of this view, that a strange idea, though expressed in a statement, is conceived by the hearer as a projection of the speaker's mind and personality, *i. e.*, as a demand upon his own mind. The first of these proofs is furnished by certain peculiar uses of the Latin verb *volo*. *Volt* and *volunt*, for instance, which are the external symbols of a demand by a third person or persons, are also used as the regular mode of introducing the religious and philosophical opinions of such persons. This use of the word is found scores of times in Cicero's philosophical writings, for example (*De Nat. Deor.* I, 26, 28, 29, 30, 33, 34, 36; II, 64, 68, etc.) But in addition to philosophical views, *volo* does also, quite frequently, introduce ideas or statements of any kind, as for instance (*Cic. Pro Cael.* 21, 53), *Si tam familiaris erat Clodiae, quam tu esse vis*. In other words, a person's *saying* or *thinking* something is looked upon as though he *wished* or *wanted* something.

Still more decisive, perhaps, is the evidence furnished in German by the use of the verb *sollen*. This verb, the cognate of the English *shall*, expresses obligation, *i. e.*, the state brought about by a command or expression of will on the part of another. So "Er soll gehen" means "I or someone else wants him to go." But this same word is also regularly used as a sign of indirect discourse, to express the opinions or words of someone else which the speaker is not ready to adopt as his own. So "Er soll fünfzig Jahr alt sein," "He is said to be fifty years old." Still further, and this we must not neglect to estimate at its true value, the same verb *sollen* is also used to reject a statement by another, just as the subjunctive is used in Latin. So my statement, "Dies

ist der König," would be thrown back at me by the exclamation "Dies soll der König sein?" Finally, in German as in Latin, the subjunctive is used with exactly the same force to express the identical shades of meaning that have been expressed by these three uses of *sollen*, namely, command, reported statement, and rejected statement.

To sum up our whole discussion in a word, then, we have found that indirect discourse will arise spontaneously only while the foreign idea is in a state of incomplete assimilation. Of this period of mental activity preliminary to complete assimilation, the subjunctive in Latin expresses an earlier, and the infinitive a later stage.

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